Q: What is the biggest challenge for the workers and volunteers at the border?
PW: There are many challenges for the staff and volunteers. Hundreds of volunteers have been responding since the surge began in 2014. The work is physically and emotionally demanding. We were receiving an average of 350 refugees per day, which is even higher currently. When the kitchen runs out of food, a request is sent to area churches, agencies, and restaurants, who respond quickly. When we run out of new undergarments, volunteers run to the store and make purchases with funding from churches, civic agencies, and people of good will.

Q: Please share a moment when you felt your presence, and that of the other Sisters, made a difference.
PW: The shelters function with the assistance of volunteers. They come from all over the country: individuals and members of faith groups, civic agencies, and Peace Corps alumni. I recall a child of perhaps three years who was alone and wailing hysterically. I led him by the hand through four dormitories before finding his mother, who was in the shower. The migrant children have suffered extreme trauma and will need therapy, education, and guidance to be healed.

Q: What aspect of your humanitarian work affected you the most?
PW: My first impression on my first day at the shelter is that the migrants are people, too. They are human beings who are desperately seeking humanitarian aid and treatment. They take the risk for safety, employment, and self-improvement.

Q: What is the biggest challenge for the refugees?
PW: The refugees/asylum seekers have many challenges. They are fleeing extreme violence, sex trafficking, and poverty. They left their villages and loved ones in pursuit of employment and safety. They arrive at the shelter after traveling long distances with only what they can carry. Many have no money. Some speak Portuguese or indigenous languages, not Spanish. They are fearful, yet hopeful and courageous.

To read more about Sr. Patricia’s visit to the border, go to her blog at https://www.csasisters.org/news-events/elpaso.cfm

Understanding Trauma is a companion piece to Messengers of Hope: A Catholic Prison Ministry Training Resource, which is a single volume that covers a wide range of subjects pertinent to those who are interested in prison ministry or are already engaged in it. Messengers of Hope comes with a companion DVD of Catholics speaking personally of their experiences with the incarcerated. This resource is $12.50.

FOR A LIMITED TIME, WE ARE OFFERING A SPECIAL PROMOTIONAL DEAL. You can order both Messengers of Hope and Understanding Trauma for the low price of only $20 for both books. Offer ends June 30, 2019. Go to www.dismasministry.org/shop to order yours today.

Newly Released Resource for Prison Ministers: Understanding Trauma
The newest publication written and developed by Dismas Ministry is Understanding Trauma: A Training Resource for Catholics in Prison Ministry. This new resource provides an examination of trauma, with the understanding that many people behind bars were perpetrators of trauma, but victims of trauma as well. As the saying goes, “Hurt people hurt people.” This publication is not an exhaustive study or explanation of trauma, but serves as a guide to help prison volunteers recognize the signs of trauma during their visits. It provides resources that may be helpful to both the prison visitor and the prisoner. This cost for this resource is $12.50.

For more information, visit www.dismasministry.org.
A seminarian at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Paul has been a Dismas Ministry volunteer since August of 2018. He comes in weekly to package bibles, prayer books, and other materials for chaplains and prisoners. Previously, Paul had been working for another nonprofit organization. Then he met Dismas Ministry founder Ron Zeilinger, and learned about the organization. Paul decided that he wanted to do something different with his ministry. The founder of the SCJs didn’t restrict their members’ apostolate, but wanted them to be open to all the needs of the world. So Paul started volunteering at Dismas Ministry in the fall semester. He feels that it is an easy job — “the hardest part is choosing the right sized box!” — and he likes that packaging is product oriented. More importantly, he finds that this ministry gets him out of his comfort zone, and feels like he is doing something useful.

As part of his ministry, Paul has had the opportunity to read letters from prisoners. In doing so, he can sense the people behind the letters and hear their desperation. They truly need bibles and prayer books as they struggle to turn their lives around. They don’t have anything and can’t afford the materials we provide. So he feels good that he can assist them and be part of something that makes a difference.

Insipred by his volunteer experience, Paul chose to minister directly to the incarcerated during the second semester of the school year. He visited the juvenile jail once a month, and was able to actually see how they used Dismas materials. The most popular resources were the study courses and prayer books — all unique to Dismas Ministry. He discovered that the prisoners using these materials experienced a personal sense of accomplishment and found purpose and meaning to keep them going.

When asked what he would say to someone interested in volunteering with Dismas Ministry, Paul said he would encourage them to get involved because it is a great ministry. He said we need to get them out of the shame and guilt. You can give them hope, help restore their dignity, and remind them they are not forgotten.

If you would like to get involved, please contact Dismas Ministry at 414-486-2383 or email at dismas@dismasministry.org.